

Present: Chairperson Jensen; Vice-Chair Ostrowski; Members: Borowski, Freedman, Liberty, Stempien, Tillman, Wayne and Westerlund

Absent: None

Also Present: Planning consultant, Borden
Building Official, Byrwa
Council members: Berndt, Mooney, Peddie and Stearn

Chairperson Jensen called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the Village of Beverly Hills municipal building at 18500 W. Thirteen Mile Road.

APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Tillman, second by Stempien, to approve the agenda as published.
Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Ostrowski, second by Liberty, that the minutes of a regular Planning Board meeting held on October 22, 2008 be approved as submitted.

Motion passed.

PRESENTATION BY ROBERT GIBBS ON SOUTHFIELD ROAD

Robert Gibbs of Gibbs Planning Group, Inc. has been retained by the Village to conduct a master planning study for the Southfield Road corridor. He is an urban planner who specializes in planning new town centers and renovating historic downtowns. The study area has been identified as the half-mile corridor of Southfield Road between Thirteen Mile and Beverly Roads. Gibbs has looked at the planning options, the zoning code, and the market potential for this property.

Gibbs stated that his presentation will reveal how the private sector with their own resources could redevelop the property into a walkable village town center. The role of Beverly Hills will not be to buy land and build parking garages, etc. Gibbs is advocating that the Village consider writing an optional zoning code called an overlay zoning code, which would allow the private sector to take underutilized property and invest its own money to develop segments of a walkable town center. What he is proposing does not have to be applied to the entire corridor. It could be executed with all the property owners working together or it could be applied to one or more properties. In some cases, a third party may emerge and assemble a number of parcels in order to build a village town center at their own expense.

The existing Southfield Road corridor appears to have been developed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The property is composed of various ownerships. Had the property been developed in the 1920s or after 2000, it would have looked like a walkable town center.

Gibbs used a PowerPoint presentation to display examples of what the private sector is building today throughout the United States. They are called either lifestyle centers, town centers, village centers, new urbanism or smart growth. If the centers include retail housing or governmental buildings and office buildings, they are known as town centers. This type of building is not allowed under zoning codes in many communities because it permits taller buildings and residential use on top of retail. Gibbs is recommending that the Village work with its planning consultant to write an optional code. There are developers around the country looking to build these types of developments. They continue to be financed because the financial community views them as less risky for the reason that they incorporate a variety of uses. If retail becomes weak, there is still housing and office uses to carry the project.

The property under study is made up of a number of individual parcels with each parcel having its own parking lot as required by the zoning ordinance. The new walkable town centers are being built with less cars per 1000 square feet of building because it has been proven that people can walk between shops. The study area contains all of the elements for a town center, but they are spread out in a linear fashion. There are apartments, an assisted care living facility, municipal offices, gas station, grocery, Borders book store, a restaurant, and health club facilities. The study area has the right elements, but they are planned in a conventional way that is no longer used. Today, you can plan to create a much more walkable community

Gibbs displayed plans that propose that some of the existing buildings could be removed. He gave examples of how existing property could be bought and redeveloped. An overlay zoning district would allow property to be developed or assembled with other parcels to construct a mixed use building. Gibbs is not advocating that any particular structure be removed.

The ability to walk in a town center is important because there will be an increasing number of empty nesters in southeast Michigan that will be leaving large lot homes and going into condominiums or apartments. There is a large amount of real estate in the study area. The parking standard is higher than is required today. There could be redevelopment on these properties offering mixed uses using today's planning techniques.

Gibbs said that Southfield Road is a high-speed five-lane highway with approximately 37,000 cars traveling on it per day. There are instances of roads in the area where traffic is slower with the same number of cars per day. Southfield Road narrows down to two or three lanes just a mile north of Beverly Hills. Gibbs is recommending that the Village explore the possibility of making Southfield Road a landscaped boulevard in order to calm traffic.

As part of this study, Gibbs has explored whether the private sector could create some sort of walkable town center. He has concluded that Beverly Hills has the market potential, the land, and the rezoning ability to provide enough incentives that the private sector could create something approaching a walkable town center in the near future. It is a real possibility without the Village doing more than hiring planning consultants. There are a lot of communities that are currently building town centers. Gibbs cautioned that it is a difficult thing to do well. He discussed basic real estate development principles that make a successful and walkable village center.

Gibbs commented that he has studied the history of planning as a hobby. He provided historical data and showed drawings depicting early planning for the Village of Lathrup Village and planning for downtown Birmingham from the 1920's to the recent master planning that occurred

in 1997. At the time the new master plan was implemented in Birmingham, the zoning code only allowed one-story buildings. This was an example of a zoning code that was holding back a strong market. Gibbs thinks that this condition exists in Beverly Hills.

The current master plan in Birmingham allows a developer to build up to five stories if the first level is retail with glass, the upper levels are housing, and the building is constructed to look like four stories. Office space must be limited to one floor. High quality building standards are required. Gibbs stated that all of the developers have chosen the optional zoning code in Birmingham in order to receive extra density. He is not proposing five story buildings in Beverly Hills, but he is suggesting that the Village go to the next level of the code.

Gibbs displayed photographs of the original Lake Forest shopping center in Chicago and described examples of Lake Forest models in other parts of the country. He suggested that the Lake Forest model, where there is a U-shape with small town square in the center, is a form that could be applied along Southfield Road. Another model that could be applied to the Southfield Road corridor is the crescent road design.

Gibbs displayed photographs of town centers constructed throughout the country and discussed the elements and dynamics of a town center. He discussed planning and retail development principles. Examples were presented to illustrate how the corridor looks today and how it could look with a town center development. By offering extra density and development rights, a municipality can require that the developers build to a certain standard. Gibbs suggested that there is a strong demand in the study area; the Village is not offering the opportunity for developers to build here. With a fresh look, the Village could add value to the real estate on Southfield Road.

Gibbs presented information gathered in a preliminary market study of retail spending potential. He talked about the demographic and income profile for Beverly Hills. His report dated January 28, 2009 includes this data. Despite of the downturn in retailing, there will still be a lot of retail stores opening in the next 5-10 years. He provided data on department stores that will be opening.

Gibbs stated that the study area is surrounded by shopping centers, but Beverly Hills is in the middle of an area that is underserved for retail. He referring to a marketplace profile for Beverly Hills showing that the Village has a large undersupply of retail and restaurants in almost every category. The Northwood shopping center at Thirteen Mile and Woodard is scheduled to be torn down, and the tenants will be displaced. The people living within your trade area are residents with high average household income according to the census tracts, and there is a lot of wealth located nearby. Gibbs commented on the congestion that exists in the downtown areas of Royal Oak and Birmingham.

Gibbs discussed the projected demand for more attached homes and small lot homes in the U.S. and the surplus of large lot homes by 2030. Beverly Hills probably has a large supply of large lot single family homes. The Village is ideally located as an inner ring suburb where new homeowners will want to live.

Gibbs displayed and described alternate Beverly Hills Village Center plans. He emphasized that he is not proposing that buildings be condemned; he has not spoken to the property owners.

Property owners would have the right to keep their property the way it is indefinitely. This plan would be an option. Should they choose to redevelop, a proposed village center plan is what could be constructed on these properties.

There was discussion about the existing properties and possible redevelopment scenarios. Gibbs stressed that redevelopment has to come from the private sector. The Village's role would be to determine what it wants its village center to look like and then write a code that offers enough incentive for owners or developers to invest money for redevelopment. He discussed ways to apply the new smart code where a few or many property owners could develop a Lake Forest type of center with everything else staying the same. His purpose was to show what the business corridor could look like should the Village modify its zoning code. Gibbs referred to a drawing illustrating that the entire half mile of property did not have to be assembled and redeveloped to implement a town center plan.

Gibbs described another plan based on the crescent form where all the land is assembled in a joint venture with all the property owners. This plan could be done in pieces. Under this scenario, there is a crescent street that would be the main street. The town center could have 25-30 restaurants and 30-40 stores. Southfield Road would accommodate the 37,000 cars per day, but at slower speeds. The plan could include a parallel lane along Southfield Road.

Gibbs suggested meeting with property owners along Southfield Road to determine the threshold that would motivate them to consider redevelopment. If the Village can live with their requirements, those items could be incorporated into an overlay zoning district. The new code could require that all parking lots and streets be connected in exchange for more density; it could allow a reduced parking count in exchange for constructing buildings to higher standards. The code could include walkable principles. It would be left to the private sector to figure out how to develop property.

Gibbs recommended that the Village attempt to work with the County and State to construct a boulevard on Southfield Road to calm the traffic and to provide on-street parking where it is safe. The creation of a village center could have a positive ripple effect on all the other real estate in the community. People will want to live and work within a walking distance of the Village's town center. Gibbs proposed that Beverly Hills has the market potential and physical space for this type of development. He reiterated that this plan works with an assemblage of property or a lesser amount of property owners.

Public Comments

In answer to an inquiry from Paul Kleppert, Gibbs said that a cost-benefit analysis could be done to establish the increase in property value and added revenue that would result from more money being spent in the commercial sector.

Janet Mooney questioned the feasibility of constructing a boulevard on Southfield Road. Gibbs responded that it would be a difficult task, but technically possible with the use of consultants and traffic engineers. He thought it was essential in order to have a walkable community.

Gibbs addressed questions from John Mooney on recommended uses for a three-story building on Southfield Road. It works best when the upper levels are one type of use.

Stearn recalled that a plan was proposed in the past years for constructing a boulevard on Southfield Road. This will be researched.

Westerlund asked about developing a parking structure to facilitate the parking aspect of a town center. Gibbs responded that the best solution would be to build a low cost parking structure surrounded by buildings to obstruct the view. There are private developers who are building these for profit. Gibbs proposed that the private sector would come in with a proposal for a one-level garage at their own expense if the Village changed its zoning to allow higher density.

Freedman questioned how to go forward with a village center plan. Gibbs suggested that the Village present the idea to the property owners and inquire what incentives they need from a zoning point of view to make this work. The Village's planning consultant could then work on drafting an overlay district or form based code that meets the values of the community.

Borowski commented on the educational aspect of the proposed village center plan that involves moving to a new mindset.

Jensen concurred that there is a need to develop a community strategy to determine what the Village hopes to accomplish. This would come out of a joint meeting between the Council and Planning Board. If there was a consensus established, the property owners could be invited to provide their input.

PLANNING CONSULTANT'S COMMENTS

None

BUILDING OFFICIAL COMMENTS

A joint meeting of the Council and Planning Board is scheduled for Wednesday, February 11. Agenda items for the next regular Council meeting will include public hearings on the following proposed ordinances: Amendments to accessory buildings and structure ordinance; Zoning Changes resulting from Neighborhood Study West of Southfield Road; and Ordinance Amendments regarding Planning Board and Zoning Board membership and appointment of alternate members.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

Motion by Wayne, second by Freedman, to adjourn the meeting at 9:48 p.m.

Motion passed.